

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 HA-05 ACDA-12 TRSE-00 AID-05 EB-08 OMB-01
DRC-01 /103 W

-----019481 081757Z /64/50

R 070710Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6183
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 2292

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

(C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - ADDS E.O., TAGS, SUBJECT)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, PK
SUBJECT: ONE WEEK OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY BAN

REF: A) ISLAMABAD 2040, B) ISLAMABAD 1995, C) ISLAMABAD 2059,
D) ISLAMABAD A-021

1. MARTIAL LAW REGULATION (MLR) 33, WHICH BANS ALL POLITICAL
ACTIVITY FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH, HAS BEEN IN FORCE ONE WEEK AND THE
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COUNTRY IS SUPERFICIALLY CALM, ALTHOUGH AN UNDERCURRENT OF UNEASE,
UNCERTAINTY AND DISCONTENT EXISTS. MOST OBSERVERS
CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THE ORDER WAS ISSUED PRIMARILY TO
CONTAIN ANY PUBLIC REACTION TO THE VERDICT, EXPECTED
SOMETIME THIS MONTH, IN THE BHUTTO MURDER TRIAL. AS TIME
PASSES, PUBLIC NERVOUSNESS INCREASES; WE HAVE REPORTS
THAT THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) HAS ORDERED

TIGHTER SECURITY PROVISIONS IN ANTICIPATION OF THE VERDICT, THAT BENAZIR BHUTTO, THE FORMER PM'S DAUGHTER, BE CONFINED TO KARACHI, AND THE DETENTION OF SOME PPP ACTIVISTS. IN ANOTHER LEGAL MOVE AGAINST BHUTTO, HIS TRIAL FOR MIS-APPROPRIATION OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS WILL BE AHEAD, BEFORE A SPECIAL COURT, ON MARCH 11.

2. THE NEWS MEDIA HAS RIGOROUSLY FOLLOWED MLR 33, AND THE NEWSPAPERS, RADION, AND TELEVISION CONSEQUENTLY OMIT VIRTUALLY ALL ITEMS WITH POLITICAL CONTENT EXCEPT THOSE DEPICTING THE CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR. EVEN THE WIRE SERVICES NO LONGER CARRY POLITICAL REPORTS, A POLICY SEEN AS OVERLY CAUTIOUS BY SOME REPORTERS WHO WOULD VIEW THE WIRE ITEMS AS PERSONALLY USEFUL EVEN IF THEY COULD NOT BE PRINTED. PAKISTAN'S NEWSPAPERS HAVE THEREFORE BEEN DULLER AND MORE SOMNOLENT IN MARCH THAN THEY WERE ANYTIME DURING THE PAST SEVERAL

YEARS--A DIFFICULT STATE TO ACHIEVE. THE ONLY EXCEPTION IS THE PPP NEWSPAPER MUSAWAT WHICH CONTINUES TO PRINT PRO-BHUTTO STORIES--ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT MORE MUTED--FUELING SPECULATION THE MLA WILL BE FORCED TO CLOSE THE PAPER.

3. THE PAKISTAN PEOPLES PARTY (PPP) SEEMS MEANWHILE TO BE PREPARING ORGANIZATIONALLY FOR THE BHUTTO TRIAL VERDICT. WE HAVE RECEIVED AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT RETIRED GENERAL TIKKA KHAN HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO A HIGH PARTY OFFICE. THE FORMER CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF HAS BEEN A LOYAL BHUTTO SUPPORTER, AND HIS RETURN TO POLITICS AFTER AN EARLIER CONFIDENTIAL

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STINT AS BHUTTOS NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR AND PPP SENATOR WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING.

4. IF TIKKA HAS JOINED THE PPP LEADERSHIP, IT IS AN ASTUTE STEP FOR THE PARTY FOR SEVERAL REASONS. TIKKA WAS AN APPORTED SENATOR AND THEREFORE CANNOT BE DISQUALIFIED FROM PARTICIPATING IN ELECTIONS UNDER THE TERMS OF THE MLA'S DISQUALIFICATION TRIBUNALS. ALSO, A FORMER CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF IN THE PPP LISTS MAY, IN BEGUM BHUTTO'S ASSESSMENT, CAUSE DISCOMFORT TO THE COUNTRY'S MILITARY RULERS.

5. AN IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHETHER TIKKA STILL COMMANDS RESPECT AND HAS A FOLLOWING IN THE ARMY AND, IF SO, TO WHAT EXTENT. WE HAVE RECEIVED VARIOUS ASSESSMENTS; SOME OBSERVERS CONTEND TIKKA IS STILL QUITE POPULAR, WHILE OTHERS SAY HIS ASSOCIATION WITH BHUTTO SEVERELY TARNISHED HIS BONA FIDES. HE CERTAINLY LACKS CHARISMA AND IS A PEDESTRIAN ORATOR. HOWEVER, IF HE BEGINS TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE PPP, WE BELIEVE HE MUST BE CONSIDERED, ON BALANCE, AN ASSET TO THE PARTY.

6. ONE OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE'S (PNA) DILEMMAS, HOW TO AVOID ELECTIONS WITHOUT APPEARING TO COOPERATE TOO CLOSELY WITH THE

MLA, HAS BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE IMPOSITION OF MLR 33. ZIA AND HIS COLLEAGUES BRIEFED POLITICAL LEADERS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES (SEPTTEL) ON MARCH FOURTH, AND ALL ATTENDED EXCEPT REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE PPP AND

ASGHAR KHAN'S TEHRIK. THE POPULAR PERCEPTION THAT THE PNA PARTIES ARE COOPERATING FULLY WITH THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT CAN ONLY BE HEIGHTENED WHEN THE PARTIES ATTEND AN MLA BRIEFING IMMEDIATELY AFTER ALL POLITICAL

ACTIVITY IS PROSCRIBED, AND SUBSEQUENTLY ARE REPORTED IN THE URDU PRESS TO HAVE MET PRIVATELY WITH GENERAL ZIA (CF. REFS C & D).

7. SOME POLITICIANS SPECULATE THAT THE BAN, DUE TO END MARCH 31, MAY BE EXTENDED AS THE ARMY ATTEMPTS TO KEEP THE LID ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY. SUCH A POSSIBILITY WAS MENTIONED -- WITH EQUANIMITY -- TO CONFIDENTIAL

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POLCOUNS BY NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY PRESIDENT SHERBAZ MAZARI IN KARACHI ON 2 MARCH. AN EXETNSION WOULD HINDER ASGHAR KHAN'S ATTEMPTS TO STAKE OUT AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL COURSE WITH PUBLIC SUPPORT, AND

IT WILL INCREASE THE PRESSURES ON THE PNA PARTIES TO BREAK THEIR TIES TO THE MLA. ALTHOUGH THE BAN HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE FOR THE FIRST WEEK, IT APPEARS MERELY PALLIATIVE; RATHER THAN OFFERING A SOLUTION TO PAKISTAN'S CONTINUING POLITICAL CRISES, IT SEEMS ONLY TO PUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT FURTHER INTO THE FUTURE.
HUMMEL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, MARTIAL LAW, POLITICAL REPRESSION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ISLAMA02292
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780136-0777, D780102-0868
Format: TEL
From: ISLAMABAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780399/aaaadfqh.tel
Line Count: 147
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2dd332cc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 ISLAMABAD 2040, 78 ISLAMABAD 1995, 78 ISLAMABAD 2059
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3420548
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ONE WEEK OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY BAN
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, PK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2dd332cc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014